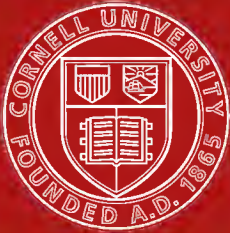


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Philip Freneau, the Huguenot patriot poet



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PHILIP FRENEAU

THE HUGUENOT PATRIOT-POET OF THE REVOLUTION, AND HIS POETRY

BY
EDWARD F. DE LANCEY

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PHILIP FRENEAU, THE HUGUENOT PATRIOT POET OF THE REVOLUTION, AND HIS POETRY.

BY EDWARD F. DE LANCEY.

AT intervals somewhat rare, the coasts of the Middle States of America have, from the earliest settlement of the country, been visited by winter storms of terrific violence. Beginning with a warm mist or gentle rain, gradually turning to sleet under a sharp northeast wind, which in a few hours becomes an intensely cold boreal hurricane, accompanied by falling masses of whirling snow, benumbing all living creatures, covering deep the face of nature and blocking up all avenues of travel, these storms temporarily paralyze man and all his occupations and duties.

Nearly threescore years ago, just before Christmas, one of these tempests, now known by the somewhat odd name of "blizzards," struck the seaboard of New York and New Jersey, raging with greater violence in the latter, especially in the county of Monmouth.

On the evening of the eighteenth day of December, 1832, an elderly gentleman of medium stature but marked mien, not dreaming of the approaching severity of the storm, left the house of friends in the town of Freehold, to walk to his own home in the outskirts of that historic village.

But that home, where he had dwelt in quiet retirement for many years, he never reached. Blinded and benumbed by the savage storm which overtook him, he lost his strength and his way. Sinking senseless into the snow, the circling swirls of which formed his winding sheet, and the tempest's deep roar his requiem, the spirit of Philip Freneau passed from earth.

Such was the tragic end of one of the most original and

gifted poets that America up to his day, and I may say to ours, has ever produced. Born in Frankfort Street in New York, in 1752, and in that city receiving his school education, he graduated from Nassau Hall, now Princeton College, New Jersey, in 1771, at the age of nineteen, two of his classmates being the celebrated Hugh Henry Brackenridge, and James Madison, afterward the fourth President of the United States.

Collegian, law student, newspaper writer, sailor, politician, sea captain, government translator of modern languages in the State Department, newspaper owner, editor, and publisher, in New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, afterward and for many years a sea captain again, and merchant, and later a retired gentleman and farmer, Philip Freneau was always a poet throughout every phase of this singularly varied career. From his boyhood to his death he was a votary of the poetic muse.

A Frenchman and a Huguenot on both sides of the house, the great quickness and brilliancy of his mind attested the former, while the firmness of his belief in his opinions proved the latter. André Fresneau (the "s" was dropped from the spelling of the name after the middle of the last century), his grandfather, one of the early Huguenots in New York, and a merchant, married Marie Morin in that city, a daughter of Pierre Morin, or Morine, as sometimes spelled, whose name appears in the records of the "Eglise du St. Esprit," in New York, as the head of one of the families of that church in 1709. And his written name can be seen in the fac-simile of the signatures of the heads of those families, in the first volume of the "Collections" of this Huguenot Society of America. This Pierre Morin was also the maternal grandfather of John Morin Scott, the noted Whig lawyer and Revolutionary general. Thus Freneau and he were both cotemporaries and first cousins. The two great-grandsons of the latter were my own intimate friends and schoolmates in my boyhood in Philadelphia, one of whom still resides in that city. André Fresneau and Marie Morin had two sons, André and Pierre. The latter was the father of the poet, who was born on the 2nd of January, 1752. The two brothers were wine merchants in New York, and successful ones. Pierre bought a large farm in Mount

Pleasant, Monmouth County, New Jersey, where much of the poet's early youth was passed; and on a portion of it which descended to him he spent his latter days. His grandparents rest in Trinity Churchyard in this city, but the later members of the family, and he himself, sleep beneath the green turf of their own burial place at Mount Pleasant.

Philip Freneau married, about 1790, Eleanor Forman, daughter of Samuel Forman, of Middletown Point, of that well-known New Jersey family; but four daughters only survived him. He left no son to bear his name. Although he belonged to the third generation of his family in America, Freneau was as thorough a Frenchman as if he had been born under the sunny skies of Provence on the banks of the blue-flowing Rhone, or had drawn his first breath amid the vine-clad hills of the Bordelais, or beneath the lofty towers of an ancient chateau of historic Normandy.

Active, brilliant, courageous, clear-headed, quick-witted, full of imagination and fancy; very polite in manner, and as ready to return a blow with the pen as with the sword, the former as sharp as the latter; he was a typical Frenchman, and as brave as he was sparkling.

There is a venerable maxim, which says, "Poetry is like claret, one enjoys it only when it is very new or when it is very old." As Freneau himself wrote: "Happy with wine we may indulge an hour," perhaps we with his verse may enjoy an hour, for the age of much of it exceeds a hundred years.

One of my relatives has still in his possession some famous wine known in the family as the "Resurrection Madeira," from the fact that an ancestor in 1776 buried a quantity of it on his estate in Westchester County, and thus preserved it from the attentions of the "Skinners," "Cowboys," "Committees," and other "Sons of the American Revolution." For the fervid patriotism of these noted heroes being as pure as their pockets and stomachs were empty, they were early marked by their superior knowledge and taste in all articles, liquid and solid, which belonged to their neighbors.

Freneau was a cotemporary of this prudent ancestor, and his poetry and the latter's wine, both of the same period, hav-

ing by reason of their inherently fine qualities reached our day, I venture to offer you some of the former, believing that its Revolutionary bouquet and flavor will be appreciated as highly now, as those of the Madeira would have been then, by the distinguished gentlemen and heroes just mentioned, had they been lucky enough to discover it.

In the old days the usual rule at feasts was, "three glasses of Madeira or port *at* dinner and three bottles of claret *after*." Sherry then was never seen on a gentleman's table. But I do not mean that we shall indulge so deeply to-night, especially as the ladies have, as yet, made no movement to leave the room ; to say nothing of the fact that the distinguished gentleman who presides over us is a prominent member of the Church Temperance Society.

Philip Freneau's earliest poems first appeared in the newspapers of the day, as in fact most of his writings did, during his whole life. Not till 1786, three years after the close of the Revolution, which his war lyrics and satires on the British leaders, civil and military, had greatly aided, were they collected and published, in a single small volume of about 350 pages, by Francis Bailey, a printer of Philadelphia. This was followed, two years later, by another, but smaller, volume of "Miscellanies," in verse and prose, on general subjects, from the same press. The first-mentioned volume also included a few poems composed before the war, beginning with "The Poetical History of the Prophet Jonah," a metrical version or, as he himself termed it, "a versified paraphrase" of that subject, in four short cantos of very considerable merit, written in 1768. Two years later, in 1770, Freneau wrote "The Pyramids of Egypt," a dramatic dialogue in blank verse. The scene is Egypt, the persons—a Traveler, a Genius and Time. It contains only 135 lines, and is one of the most striking poems ever written by so young a man. The Traveler, who has visited Italy, arrives in Egypt, meets the Genius, and asks to be shown the Pyramids, saying that he thought the remnants of Rome, he had lately seen, were unrivalled. The Genius thus answers :

"Talk not of Rome ! before they lopt a bush
From the seven hills, where Rome, Earth's Empress, stood,

These pyramids were old, their birthday is
Beyond tradition's reach, or history."

On seeing them, the Traveler asks how many generations,
monarchies and empires,

———" had their rise and fall
While these remain, and promise to remain,
As long as yonder sun shall gild their summits,
Or moon, or stars, their wonted circles run."

The Genius replies:

"The time shall come
When these stupendous piles you deem immortal,
Worn out with age shall moulder on their bases,
And down, down, low to endless ruin verging,
O'erwhelmed by dust, be seen and known no more."

* * * * *

"'Twas on this plain the ancient Memphis stood,
Her walls encircled these tall pyramids,—
But where is Pharaoh's palace, where the domes
Of Egypt's haughty lords?—All, all, are gone,
And like the phantom snows of a May morning
Left not a vestige to discover them!"

To the Traveler's further question, how the pyramids were
built, the Genius says:

"What cannot tyrants do,
When they have subject nations to their will,
And the world's wealth, to gratify ambition?
Millions of slaves beneath their labors fainted,
Who here were doomed to toil incessantly,
And years elapsed while groaning myriads strove
To raise this mighty tomb,—and but to hide
The worthless bones of an Egyptian king."

The poem closes with Time's address to the Traveler in
these striking lines:

"These piles are not immortal.
This earth, with all its balls of hills and mountains,
Shall perish by my hand. Then how can these,

These hoary-headed pyramids of Egypt,
 That are but dwindled warts upon her body,
 That on a little, little spot of ground
 Extinguish the dull radiance of the sun,
 Be proof to death and me? Traveler, return,
 There's naught but God immortal—He alone
 Exists secure, when Man, and Death, and Time,
 (Time not immortal, but a fancied point in the vast circle of
 eternity)
 Are swallowed up, and like the pyramids,
 Leave not an atom for their monument."

Is not this true poetry? Is it not extraordinary as the work of a youth of eighteen years? But one other American poet ever wrote anything to compare with it so early in life. Bryant wrote at nineteen his "Thanatopsis," and never later did he surpass that great poem, although it contains but eighty-one lines.

Totally dissimilar as these two poets were, in almost every characteristic, physical and mental, Freneau being as warm as Bryant was cold, there was yet a singular parallelism in their literary careers. Both were educated men, both college graduates, Freneau of Princeton, Bryant of Williams; both wrote as mere youths, and wrote then as men of twice their ages might be proud to write. Both studied law and then threw it aside. Both became hot politicians and fierce political writers. Both had an irresistible desire to publish newspapers, and both became editors of their own papers, and editors of power. Both wrote vigorous, nervous, yet polished, prose. Both continued to write poetry during their whole lives. Both were eminent as translators of the ancient classics. Both made purely literary ventures, and both wrote satires, and bitter ones. Both became involved in personal conflicts. Both wrote strongly against slavery. Both were eminently worshippers, as well as poets, of nature. Both, as their lives grew apace, left the press to others and passed their latter days in quiet retirement. And both enjoyed almost the longest span of life allotted to man, Freneau dying in his eighty-first, and Bryant in his eighty-sixth year.

But here the parallel ends, for, unlike Bryant, Freneau wrote better in later life than in youth, and his range of subjects and kinds of verse were wider and more varied. Bryant possessed great application, however, while Freneau had little. In fact, the latter was too versatile for his own good.

Freneau's poetry may be considered in three classes—war lyrics and satires, poems on general subjects and descriptions of nature, and translations from the classic poets and those of Italy and France, with a few which do not strictly fall under either of these heads. They vary greatly in style and finish, some wanting much of the latter quality. Freneau was naturally impulsive, inclined to indolence and often careless; and his verse sometimes reflects his moods. He seems to have written just as the incident or event happened which formed his theme, or as the idea he expressed occurred to him. Like many men of active intellect and quick perceptions, as I have said, he lacked application. Content to write for the hour, and satisfied if the effect or object aimed at was secured, he little regarded the future of the children of his brain. Hence he has left us no great narrative poem and no epic.

His verse is wonderful for its ease, simplicity, humor, great command of language and delicacy of handling. Except Dryden and Byron no poet of America or England has shown himself a greater master of English or of rhyme. The luxuriance of his stanzas is sometimes amazing. Only to the temporary nature of the subjects of most of his verse, especially of his satires, can be ascribed the desuetude into which his poems have fallen.

In vigor, sentiment, playfulness, and humor, many of them cannot be surpassed, and their beauties of form and expression are as great now as when they were first given to the world.

But Freneau possessed other and deeper poetic gifts. We have all wondered at and admired the poems of that strange son of genius of our day, the late Edgar Allan Poe. Yet the strange power of that extraordinary man existed also in the earlier poet. His "House of Night—A Vision" prefigured the wondrous conceptions of the author of "The Raven." Though not at all alike, there is in the supernatural weirdness

on each a similarity. Freneau's dreamer, wandering at midnight in a dark wood, comes upon a noble dome. Entering and ascending, he hears "a hollow voice of loud lament" from out a vaulted chamber, which proves to be that of Death, personified in human form, stretched on his dying bed. He is attended by the castle's lord, who has just suffered a heavy affliction, and who, in obedience to the divine precept, "If thine enemy hunger feed him, if he thirst give him drink," tries to assuage his sufferings, but at the same time tells him that his end is inevitable. Death gives him certain directions, orders his own burial, and dies in the greatest agony. Everything is faithfully carried out. The vision passes away, the dreamer wakes, and the poem closes with his reflections on death and what it really is. The death of Death is thus described :

"And from within, the howls of Death I heard,
Cursing the dismal night that gave him birth,
Damning his ancient sire and mother sin,
Who at the gates of hell, accursed, brought him forth.

* * * * *

"Oft his pale breast, with cruel hands he smote,
And tearing from his limbs a winding sheet,
Roared to the black skies, while the woods around,
As wicked as himself, his words repeat.

'Thrice tow'rd the skies his meagre arms he rear'd,
Invoked all hell and thunders on his head,
Bid lightnings fly, earth yawn, and tempests roar,
And the sea wrap him in its oozy bed.

* * * * *

"And now the phantom Death
Gave his last groans in horror and despair.
'All hell demands me hence,' he said, and threw
The red lamp hissing through the midnight air."

Then follows a most vivid description of the burial. The vision ends, the dreamer awakes, and the poem closes with these reflections :

“What is this Death, ye deep-read sophists, say ?
 Death is no more than one unceasing change ;
 New forms arise while other forms decay,
 Yet all is Life throughout creation's range.

* * * * *

“Hills sink to plains, and man returns to dust,
 That dust supports a reptile or a flower ;
 Each changeful atom by some other nurs'd,
 Takes some new form, to perish in an hour.”

Another and a very different gift which Freneau possessed in an extraordinary degree was his power of invective. In this, some of his satires rival the “Absalom and Achitophel,” and the “English Bards and Scotch Reviewers” in vigor, as well as in the torrent-like flow of the verse.

Listen to these lines upon an opponent who had attacked him in abusive rhyme, and whom, under an odd name, he has immortalized :

“Hail, great MacSwiggen ! foe to honest fame,
 Patron of dunces and thyself the same,
 You dream of conquest,—tell me how or whence,
 Act like a man, and combat me with sense.

* * * * *

“Clad in the garb of sacred sanctity,
 What madness prompts thee to invent a lie ?
 Thou base defender of a wretched crew,
 Thy tongue let loose on those you never knew.
 The human spirit with the brutal joined,
 The imps of *Orcus* in thy breast combined ;
 The genius barren, and the wicked heart,
 Prepared to take each trifling scoundrel's part ;
 The turn'd up nose, the monkey's foolish face,
 The scorn of reason, and your sire's disgrace.
 Assist me, gods, to drive this dog of rhyme
 Back to the torments of his native clime,
 Where dulness mingles with her native earth.”

This is certainly equal to Dryden, yet Freneau wrote it when only twenty-three.

His war lyrics and satires are models of their kind, easy,

spirited, pungent, and as humorous in describing persons as keen in depicting their characteristics. A line, an epithet or a verse occasionally occurs, too coarse for good taste, but his sins of this kind are exceedingly few. His thorough personal knowledge of the period in which he lived, and of the men, and the politics in which he took part, gave him great advantages, of which he was by no means slow to profit.

The two famous New York printers of the Revolutionary era have never been so well described as by Freneau, severe as he was upon both. His pen portraits of James Rivington and Hugh Gaine are well-nigh perfect. The former, an Englishman by birth, who began publishing a paper in New York in 1773, Freneau wrote of as a fierce Tory; but occasionally he seems to have had a vague suspicion of what is now known to be the fact, that he was, or rather became, a spy for Washington. Certainly deception incarnate was never painted with greater force than in Freneau's characterizations of Rivington.

As to Gaine he knew him well, and was familiar with his long career in New York before, during, and after, the Revolution. A Belfast Irishman, he printed a paper in New York from 1752 to about 1786. Favoring the opposition to the British Ministry in the early stages of the dispute, but supporting them later, on the capture of New York by Sir William Howe, Gaine fled to Newark, New Jersey, but in a few months returned, resumed the publication of his paper, maintained it during the English occupation, and at its close, taking the royal arms from its heading, and removing the Crown from beside the Bible on his office sign, in Hanover Square, continued the paper, as Rivington did his, both as good Republican sheets. Nevertheless, till his death in the early part of this century he was considered a personally honest man.

In a poem in the form of "A Letter to the Whigs of New York," supposed to be written by Rivington, in December, 1783, just after the evacuation, Freneau makes him say:

"'Twas a *chance*, a mere chance, that your arms gain'd the day,
'Twas a *chance* that the Britons so soon went away,
To *chance* by their leaders the nation is cast,
And *chance* to perdition will send them at last.

" Now because I remain when the puppies are gone,
 You would willingly see me hanged, quartered, and drawn,
 Though I think I have logic sufficient to prove,
 That the *chance* of my stay is a proof of my love.

* * * * *

" And therefore excuse me for printing some lays,
 An ode, or a sonnet, in Washington's praise.

" His prudence alone has preserved your dominions,
 This bravest and boldest of all the Virginians !
 And when he has gone,—I pronounce it with pain,
 We scarcely shall meet with his equal again."

In the second part of this same poetical letter, occur these lines :

" If you stood my attacks I have nothing to say,
 I fought like the Swiss for the sake of my pay,
 But while I was proving your fabric unsound,
 Our vessel miss'd stays, and we all went aground.

" Thus ended in ruin what madmen begun,
 And thus was our nation disgraced and undone.

* * * * *

" You pretend I have suffered no loss in the cause,
 And have therefore no right to partake of your laws.
 Some people love talking—I find to my cost,
 I too am a loser,—my character's lost ! "

At the end of the letter he mentions a visit from the ghost of Gen. Robertson, the last British governor, who advises him to go to Nova Scotia, " which," he tells the Whigs,—

" I surely shall do if you push me too hard,
 And so I remain, with eternal regard,
James Rivington, printer of late to the King,
 But now a republican under your wing—
 Let him stand where he is, don't push him down hill,
 And he'll turn a true blue skin or just what you will."

Another short poem styled " Truth Anticipated " ends with a brief keen epitaph upon Rivington, in these witty lines :

“ Here *lies* a King's Printer, we needn't say who :
 There is reason to think he tells what is true :
 But if he *lies* here, 'tis not overstrange,
 His present position is but a small change,
 So reader, pass on—'tis a folly to sigh,
 For all his life long he did little but *lie*.”

Gaine, Freneau treated in a little different way, perhaps induced by the fact that in his paper some of his earlier poems first saw the light. In a versified petition to the Senate of New York, in 1783, for recognition, he makes Gaine give this account of himself, and in it incidentally expresses his own idea of his own powers:

“ I first was a whig with an honest intent,
 Not a fellow among them talk'd louder or bolder,
 With his sword by his side, or his gun on his shoulder ;
 Yes, I was a whig, and a whig from my heart,
~~But~~ still from Britain was unwilling to part,
 I knew to oppose her was foolish and vain,
 I knew she would turn and embrace us again,
 And make us as happy as happy could be,
 By renewing the era of mild SIXTY-THREE ;
 And yet like a cruel undutiful son,
 Who evil returns for the good to be done,
 To gain a mere trifle,—a shilling or so,
 I printed some treason for Philip Freneau,
 Some damnable poems reflecting on Gage,
 The King and his Council, and writ with such rage,
 So full of invective, and loaded with spleen,
 So pointedly sharp, and so hellishly keen,
 That, at least in the judgment of half our wise men,
 Alecto herself made the nib to his pen.” ·

It is in this poem that there occurs an exceedingly fine image—one of the striking creations of a true poet.

In describing the general flight of inhabitants from New York, which followed the defeat of Washington at Brooklyn, and Gaine's escape on horseback to New Jersey with the rest, he says :

"To Newark I hastened, but trouble and care,
Got up on the crupper and followed me there."

In 1780, Freneau sailed from Philadelphia, in the letter of marque *Aurora*, for the West Indies, but was captured off the capes of the Delaware by the British frigate *Iris*, and sent to New York, a prisoner of war, where he was confined on board the *Scorpion* prison ship, and falling ill he was transferred to a hospital vessel. This incident and his severe treatment he has set forth in a poem in three brief, spirited cantos entitled, "The British Prison Ship." His destination is first described :

"those isles where endless summer reigns,
 Fair fruits, gay blossoms, and enamelled plains,
 Where sloping lawns the roving swain invite,
 And the cool morn succeeds the breezy night,
 Where each glad day a heaven unclouded brings,
 And sky-topt mountains teem with golden springs."

The last broadside of the *Iris*' guns which effects the capture, is thus given :

"Another blast as fatal in its aim,
 Wing'd by destruction, through our rigging came
 And, whistling tunes from hell upon its way,
 Shrouds, stays, and braces, tore at once away,
 } Sails, blocks, and oars, in scattered fragments fly—
 Their softest language was, SUBMIT OR DIE."

The sufferings of the prisoners from the brutalities of the guards, starvation and thirst, and his resulting illness and transfer to the hospital ship, and its surgeon, are most vividly portrayed, as well as the latter's treatment, which is set forth in these biting words :

"He drench'd us well with bitter draughts, 'tis true,
Nostrums from hell, and *cortex* from Peru,—
 Some with his pills he sent to Pluto's reign,
 And some he blistered with his flies of Spain ;
 His cream of tartar walked its deadly round,
 Till the lean patient at the potion frown'd,
 And swore that hemlock, death, or what you will,
 Were nonsense to the drugs that stuff'd his bill."

He thus describes the daily deaths and burials on the Long Island shore at the Wallabout :

“By feeble hands the shallow graves were made,
No stone memorials o’er the corpses laid ;
In barren sands, and far from home, they lie,
No friend to shed a tear when passing by ;
O’er the mean tombs insulting Britons tread,
Spurn at the sand, and curse the rebel dead.”

An appeal then follows to Americans to

“Rouse from your sleep, and crush the thievish band,
Defeat, destroy, and sweep them from the land ;”

and the poem closes with this prediction of final defeat to the British :

“The years approach that shall to ruin bring
Your lords, your chiefs, your miscreant of a King,
Whose murderous acts shall stamp his name accurs’d,
And his last triumphs more than damn his first.”

The whole poem of about 700 lines was intended to rouse up American feeling, then—in 1780—excessively depressed ; and the extracts that have been given will show Freneau’s power to arrest public attention, as well as the variety, beauty and force of different characteristics of his verse.

Of course the poem is exaggerated in its statements, but in this the skill of the true poet shows itself, for in all appeals of this kind, exaggeration is a necessity if an effect is to be produced—just as the sculptor is obliged to make the figure of his hero larger than life, if his statue is to be impressive.

It was believed by the ancients that to poets was given the power of foretelling future events, and the earliest name by which the Romans called them was *vates*, which primarily signifies a prophet, a seer. This idea, perhaps not altogether fanciful, was, before their time, held by the Greeks in connection with their religion, for in those old days priests were poets and poets were priests.

No poet ever possessed this prophetic gift in a greater

degree than Philip Freneau. In the very dialogue he wrote for his commencement piece, in 1771, occur these lines:

—" I see, I see
Freedom's established reign ; cities and men,
Numerous as the sands upon the ocean shore,
And empires rising where the sun descends !
The Ohio soon shall glide by many a town
Of note ; and where the Mississippi's stream,
By forests shaded, now runs weeping on,
Nations shall grow, and States, not less in fame
Than Greece and Rome of old ! We too shall boast
Our Scipios, Solons, Catos, sages, chiefs,
That in the womb of time yet dormant lie,
Waiting the joyous hour of life and light.
O, snatch me hence, ye muses, to those days
When through the veil of dark antiquity,
Our sons shall hear of us as things remote
That blossom'd in the morn of days—Alas !
How could I weep that we were born so soon,
Just in the dawning of these mighty times,
Whose scenes are painting for eternity."

In " The Power of Fancy," a brilliant poem, beginning

" Wakeful, vagrant, restless, thing,
Ever wandering on the wing,"

he describes in flowing verse how Fancy leads him through various famed places in Europe and Asia to an isle of the Indian seas, and then exclaims :

" Bear me from that distant strand
Over ocean, over land
To California's golden shore,—
Fancy stop, and rove no more."

This was written in 1770, seventy-eight years before the discovery of gold in the race-way of the famous mill of Colonel Sutter, in the valley of the Sacramento.

Again, in September, 1775, appeared in New York one of those " damnable poems reflecting on Gage " which have already been mentioned, in two parts. The first is 'an imaginary discussion of a council of war held by Gage in Boston, in which

Burgoyne, Percy, Howe and Wallace take part and decide on a plan of operations. The second is a bold protest, an appeal to Americans to resist Britain's claims, containing this fine passage :

"The time shall come when strangers rule no more,
Nor cruel mandates vex from Britain's shore,

* * * * *

"When mighty towns shall flourish free, and great,
Vast their dominion, opulent their state,
When one vast cultivated region teems
From ocean's side to Mississippi's streams,
While each enjoys his vine-tree's peaceful shade,
And even the meanest has no foe to dread."

This last poem is very remarkable for another and a very different subject. It contains a most striking and effective proof of a fact in Revolutionary history, which it is the modern fashion for writers and orators on that subject, of every degree, to conceal, ignore or slur over. That fact is, that the Revolutionary War was *not* begun to obtain independence, but *was* begun to obtain those rights of Englishmen which all Americans claimed as their birthright, and which the British government wickedly denied them.

Its closing stanza is this :

"Long may Britannia rule our hearts again,
Rule, as she ruled, in George the Second's reign ;
May ages hence her growing grandeur see,
And she be glorious—but ourselves as free."

And this, be it remembered, was written six months *after* Bunker's Hill.

Perhaps the finest of Freneau's war lyrics is his ode "To the memory of the brave Americans who fell at Eutaw Springs." It consists of but eight stanzas of four lines each. For melody, spirit, fire and feeling, it has rarely, if ever, been surpassed. This is the poem of which Mr. Henry Brevoort tells us that Sir Walter Scott asked him the author's name, saying he had met it in a magazine, had it by heart, and knew it was American. On being told it was Freneau's, Scott said,

"It was as fine a thing of the kind as there was in the language." And he used a line from it in his famous apostrophe to the Duke of Brunswick, in the introduction to the third canto of *Marmion*.

Freneau's fifth verse is this:

"They saw their injur'd country's woe;
The flaming town, the wasted field;
They rushed to meet the insulting foe;
They took the spear, but left the shield."

Scott wrote, improving the line by using a stronger verb:

"Lamented chief, not thine the power
To save in that presumptuous hour,
When Prussia hurried to the field,
And snatched the spear, but left the shield."

One of the most delicate and tender of Freneau's poems is that entitled, "Lines on Visiting an Old Indian Burying-Ground," and describing his visions while within its ancient precincts at night:

"There, oft a restless Indian Queen
(Pale Marion with her braided hair),
And many a barbarous form, is seen
To chide the man that lingers there."

"By midnight moons, o'er moistening dews,
In vestments for the chace arrayed,
The hunter still the deer pursues,
The hunter and the deer a shade."

This last line, beautiful, and characterized by the fine sentiment of Freneau, so struck Thomas Campbell that he placed it, unchanged, in a verse of his famous poem of O'Connor's Child, thus describing her dead lover as she sees him in spirit, while watching his grave:

"He comes, and makes her glad;
Now on the grass green turf he sits,
His tasseled horn beside him laid;
Now o'er the hills in chace he flies,
The hunter and the deer a shade."

But, sorry am I to say, neither of these poets ever acknowledged their indebtedness to Philip Freneau.

Freneau's originality was very marked. He followed not in the steps of Dryden, nor any other of the poets of the Augustan age; nor like his contemporaries, Trumbull and Barlow, in those of Young and Pope. Not only did he not follow classic example, but he struck out a style of his own. Free, clear and expressive, he cast aside the trammels of the stately verse in which his predecessors and contemporaries delighted, and wrote just as he seems to have felt, and in whatever way he deemed most appropriate to his subject. Although careless in his rhymes, he was, nevertheless, always effective.

So long was his life that he wrote some of his finest poems after the advent of that brilliant galaxy of poets, who burst forth in the early part of this nineteenth century. But not a trace of Moore, Southey, Campbell, Rogers, Scott, Wordsworth or Byron, is to be found in the last two small volumes of his poems which he gave to the world in 1815.

Freneau's prose writings were of two kinds, brief essays on many subjects after the manner of the *Spectator* and the *Tattler*; and travels and reports of an imaginary character, related and made to their kings by an inhabitant of Otaheite, and a Creek Indian, after their return from civilized lands, after the example of Voltaire. To these may be added his political disquisitions and translations from French historical writers. The best of the former were written over the pen-name of "Robert Slender." All are pleasing, witty, humorous, easy and agreeable, and show great and close power of observation.

His political writings, action and opinions, are a most interesting theme, but they would require a full essay to be adequately presented. A strong Democrat, a believer in Jefferson, and like so many men of his day, carried away by the French Revolution, the ardor of his nature and the firmness of his opinions, with the vigor and terseness of his style, made him an adversary to be feared.

(The quarrel between Hamilton and Jefferson, growing out of his editing a newspaper in the interest of the latter, while

holding the place of French translator under the government, in which he attacked the financial policy of the former, during Washington's first administration, and which so greatly annoyed the great President, is a matter of history. Freneau was as perfectly sincere and honest in his political opinions as he was free and outspoken in their expression.) (Leaving politics and the party press after a few years, he resumed his sea life about the year 1800, and became again engaged in voyages and mercantile ventures, from which facts he is often referred to as "Captain Freneau.") To this period are to be ascribed some of his finest and most perfect descriptions of nature, especially of nature in the tropics. Two poems, one styled "The Beauties of Santa Cruz," and the other descriptive of the shores of Carolina and Charleston, are instinct with true poetic fire. His versified translations from the Latin show how well his college days were spent, and how late in life he kept up his classic studies. No finer rendition of the fifteenth ode of the first book of Horace, Nereus's prophecy of the destruction of Troy, than Freneau's exists; while his translation of Gray's famous "Ode written at the Grande Chartreuse," is as striking and beautiful as the original itself.

Such was the poetry of the Huguenot patriot of the Revolution. Born eight years before the death of George the Second, and living far into the presidency of the seventh ruler of the United States, General Andrew Jackson, Philip Freneau is the only poet whose ringing verse roused alike the hearts, and nerved the arms, of two generations of Americans against England. He immortalized alike the successes of the Revolution and those of the war of 1812. He sang, with equal spirit, force and fire, the glory of Trenton and the triumph of Chippewa, the conqueror of Yorktown and the victor of Niagara. He sang, too, the heroic battles of Paul Jones on the German ocean, and those of Perry and McDonough on the waves of Erie and the waters of Champlain; and also, but in sadder strains, the fate of André and the death of Ross.

